

PRIVATE AND CONFIDENTIAL

MEMORANDUM FOR SECRETARY CARTER

FROM: CHRISTOPHER KIRCHHOFF

MARCH 18, 2015

I want privately share several observations as you consider who to recommend for nomination as the next Chairman and Vice-Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I draw these observations from having worked closely with Dempsey and Winnefeld for over three years as well as working this past year in the White House Chief of Staff's office under John Podesta and now in the National Security Council.

I believe you should give serious consideration to placing Winnefeld in the slate of candidates the White House evaluates as Dempsey's successor. I am naturally and fiercely loyal to a person I have worked so closely with. But I have also seen up close the traits in Winnefeld that would serve you and the President so well given the dynamics now at play within the White House team.

First and most importantly, Winnefeld is a lucid thinker in crisis whose grasp of the substance of military options would best serve you and the President in a true emergency. He is more ready than anyone else for the 3am phone call. You will do many things as Secretary of Defense. None of them matter as much as helping the President make the best decision for the nation in extremis. It is hard to imagine a better pair than you and he to perform this vital function should the awful reality of its necessity arrive.

Second, we are approaching an institutional reckoning of such proportion, and with such discontinuous solutions, that consensus building is not an optimal leadership strategy. We have to go so far and so fast in the next two years that leadership from the top down is more needed than ever. Waiting for new Chairman and new set of Chiefs to come to consensus on how they recommend you proceed is a recipe for slowing your very ability as Secretary to move the Department to a new set point. It is the Chiefs that need to be following your lead as you rapidly navigate exceedingly difficult issues with little margins on any side. This is to say, you will be best served by a Chairman that shares your views on the core issues and understands that the tradition of striving for consensus among the Chiefs will have to be carefully balanced against the exceeding pressure we are under to act.

Third, as a Secretary whose standing in the Cabinet, with the President, and with the public, is not where it will be by the time you leave office, you need a

Chairman that works well with this White House, and Winnefeld does. He goes on monthly runs with McDonough. Podesta likes him. The whole NSC admires the rigor he brings into the Sit Room. When the relationship between the White House and Hagel broke down completely, he and Dempsey succeeded at continuing to express the building's views.

While your arrival has begun to bring order back to normal, the expectation of the role of the Chairman and Vice among current White House seniors has now been raised. Any candidate that does not bring the level of teamwork of Winnefeld or Dempsey to the policy-making process will be seen as a letdown. The high bar they have set for providing best military advice is one you must equal or surpass in who you recommend to replace them. The uncertainty of how your relationship would evolve with another Chairman who has not experienced the arc this White House has traveled for the past six years thus constitutes a significant potential risk to your own relationship with the President, who prizes rigor and germaneness in those who advise him above all else. Since you will rarely see the President without the Chairman at your side, the chemistry between all three of you is an important variable to factor in.

Fourth, asking Winnefeld to serve a further two years will help lock in continuity across Administrations, ensuring the rationale behind the priorities you set, and policy decisions you make, does not depart with whatever turnover of appointees occurs in 2016. Winnefeld has already weathered with high marks the transition from the George W. Bush Administration to Obama while serving as the J-5. He is the very kind of clear and calm thinker that would serve a new President well rather than triggering the kind of antibodies that so polluted the early relationship between the Clinton White House, Powell, and the Pentagon.

Lastly, I have caught glimpses of Winnefeld beginning to run the Tank, and conduct his interactions with others, with a finesse that can only be described as Dempsey-esque. He's getting choosier about when he pushes his own views. He listens more. He is more patient. And his command of an astonishing array of substance, both geopolitical and technical, is only building. With Winnefeld it is all about the details. He doesn't let the details slip. The details are the substance.

Winnefeld, in short, is the very kind of partner who would magnify your strengths as Secretary and work most smoothly with this White House team. You should give serious thought to including him on the slate of candidates you give the President.